

Humanities Year 9

Local Issues unit + assessment tasks

Understanding local politics.
Researching a political issue.

At the end of this unit, you will understand that:

- A democracy allows citizens to practise freedom of speech.
- Lobbying, protesting and pressuring are methods through which citizens can express their views to a government.
- Throughout Australian political history, protest and pressure groups have changed government decision-making.

Through the study of local political issues, you will learn about how local government works and how it can be influenced by citizens' action.

The local issues we will investigate are:

1. Taxi drivers protest for safety
2. Dredging of Port Phillip Bay
3. The development in the St Kilda Triangle

Issue 1: Driven to drastic action (Taxi Drivers)

Ben Haywood, May 12, 2008, THE AGE

A protest by drivers will change the way taxis work, writes Ben Haywood.



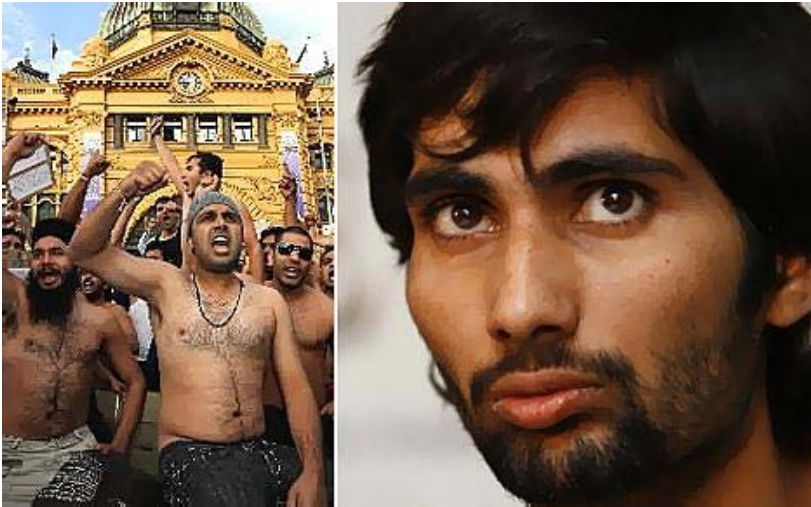
1. What happened?

In early May 2008, hundreds of taxi drivers blockaded one of Melbourne's busiest intersections to demand the State Government take urgent steps to improve their working conditions.

The 22-hour protest at the intersection of Flinders and Swanston streets ended in victory for the drivers when the Transport Minister, Lynne Kosky, agreed to their biggest demands: the subsidised installation of safety screens for drivers who want them and the mandatory prepayment of fares between 10pm and 5am.

The Government agreed to waive parking fines incurred by many drivers during the protest and develop an education campaign. Drivers will also have access to free training in risk assessment and dealing with difficult passengers.

The protest came after the stabbing of 23-year-old taxi driver Jalvinder Singh. Police said Mr Singh - an Indian student who had only recently become a taxi driver - was left bleeding from multiple stab wounds for two hours after being attacked by a passenger at about 3am on April 29. The attack was the final straw for drivers, who were increasingly concerned about their safety on the job, and felt neglected by the State Government and police.



2. How did people react?

The protest by taxi drivers sparked a broader debate about the Victorian taxi industry. While driver safety was recognised as important, concerns also surfaced about the quality of service. Critics said cabs were dirty and in disrepair and drivers did not know their way around the city. Others defended cab drivers, saying the low rate of pay - estimated at \$8 an hour - keeps service poor.

Another argument is that the structure of the industry is to blame for the poor service and for bad working conditions, and that it needs reform.

There are 3768 taxi licences in metropolitan Melbourne and they have a high market value: about \$490,000 each. Only 40% of licence owners operate a taxi, with the remaining 60% treating their licences as investments - leasing them out to operators for about \$24,000 a year. As a result, some say, the nature of the industry has changed. Instead of being a service-based industry that relies on good customer service for success, it has become an investor-based industry keen to keep costs down. They argue that conditions for drivers and passengers have dropped as a result.

There was also debate about the taxi drivers' protest.

Some said that by bowing to drivers' demands, the Government set a bad precedent for future disputes with other industries. They believe the drivers' victory sent a message to other lobby groups that blockading the city and causing major disruption is the best way to get your way with the Government. But others have praised the taxi drivers' savvy use of their democratic power as something all Australians could learn from.

3. Are drivers undervalued?

Taxis make 35 million trips a year in Victoria and are an essential part of Melbourne's public transport network, yet many cab drivers feel undervalued by the community and neglected by the Government.

Drivers work long shifts for low pay, and often face violence and abuse from passengers.

One Melbourne trauma psychologist told The Age that many drivers suffer from post-traumatic stress after being attacked on the job. And, as though pay wasn't low enough, the Victorian Taxi Association says drivers lose, on average, three fares a month to fare evaders.

Others say many drivers are undervalued by the taxi licence owners that lease out their cabs and seek only to minimise costs and maximise income with little regard for the wellbeing of the drivers or their passengers. The Government is planning a public education campaign to build respect for cab drivers, while some say that improving service standards - by improving driver training and the condition of cabs - is the only way to win respect. But others point out that taxi drivers are often blamed for problems they cannot solve. In the case of the 60% of Melbourne's taxis that are leased



out, it is the owner of the cab, not the driver, that has the responsibility to make these improvements.

4. Recent headlines

"Taking it to the streets" The Age, May 2

"Cab charge" Herald Sun, May 1

"Assault, abuse, fare evasion, 12-hour shifts, poor security. All this for \$8 an hour" The Age, May 1

5. What The Age says

"Few industries have a greater exposure to the ratbaggery of the public than the taxi sector. Drivers are vulnerable. They transport strangers who for whatever reason - being drunk, drug-addled, abusive or violent - make their working environment unsafe and unpleasant. Everyone needs to feel safe in their workplace. No one more so than a taxi driver picking up people late at night. The Government yesterday made the right moves in securing that peace of mind." *Editorial opinion, May 2*

6. What people say

"Most of my friends have been assaulted. And there is some fear in my heart that I'm going today (to work) but I don't know what's going to happen to me." *Taxi driver Adam Dhillon, The Age, May 3*

"Australia has all the institutional pillars of a working democracy but sometimes this democracy is taken for granted. If Indian migrants refresh the democratic spirit through peaceful protest and focus the Australian mind on the effectiveness of standing up for your rights, it can't be a bad thing." *Sushi Das, senior writer, The Age, May 2*

"If taxi drivers want more respect they should provide a better service. If they want more respect they need to keep their cabs clean, behave with simple courtesy and work out where the MCG is. Many already get respect because they do that and know their way around town. Too many do not." *3AW morning radio host, Neil Mitchell, Herald Sun, May 1*

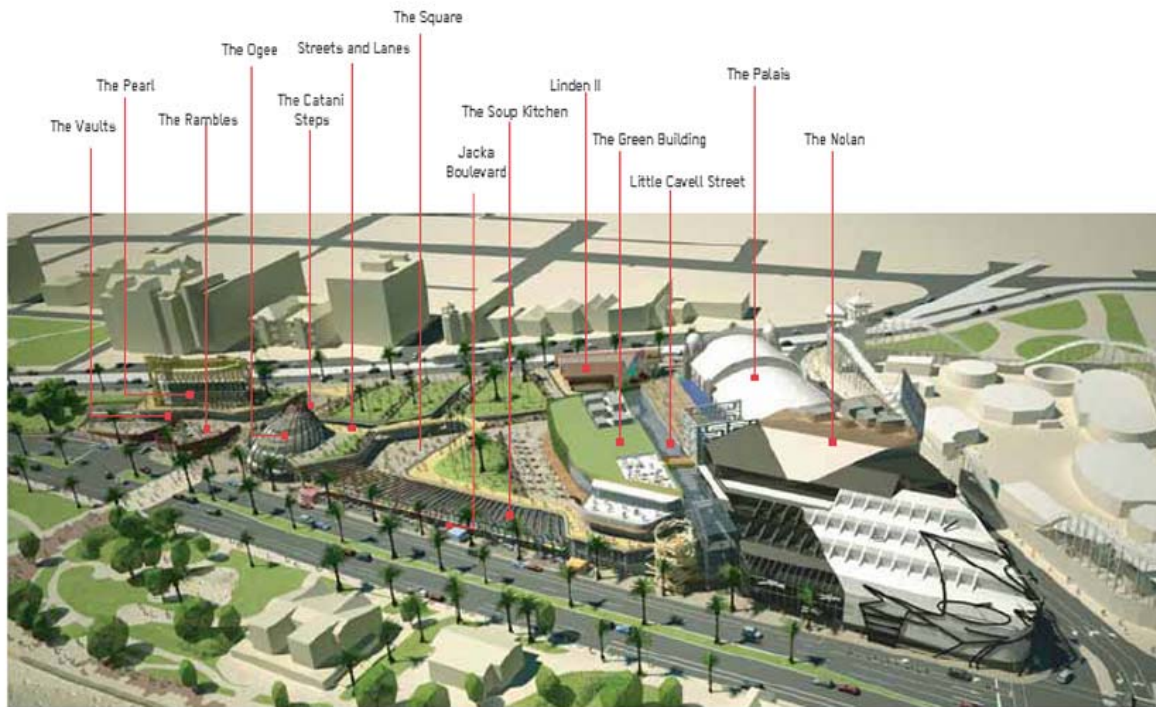
Source: <http://www.education.theage.com.au/pagedetail.asp?intpageid=1989&strsection=&intsectionid=0>

Questions: Taxi Driver Protest

Answer these questions in complete sentences in your workbook.

1. Identify the levels of government are involved in this issue.
2. Describe the event which led up to the start of the taxi drivers' protest.
3. Name the main issue the protesters campaigned for.
4. The State government has given in to the demands of the taxi drivers and agreed to implement five measures to help taxi drivers.
Name these five measures.
5. Apart from staging a big protest in front of Flinders Street station, identify other possible avenues for the taxi drivers to make their voices heard.
Use the text and draw on your previous knowledge about the political process to answer this question.
6. How did they exercise their democratic rights to get their demands met?
7. Do you think that the democratic process has worked in the case of the taxi drivers?
Give view on the Government's actions.
Did they do the right thing by giving in to the taxi drivers' demands?
Give reasons for your answer.

Issue 2: St Kilda Triangle Development



Use the internet and the specific websites to find the answers to the questions on the next page. Answer in complete sentences.

<http://www.savestkilda.org.au/>

<http://www.stkildatriangle.com.au/>

http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/stkilda_triangle_site.html

<http://unchainstkilda.org/>

"st kilda triangle" site:theage.com.au

"st kilda triangle" site:news.com.au/heraldsun

Research questions on St Kilda Triangle

Answer these questions in complete sentences:

- 1) Describe the St. Kilda Triangle issue in a minimum of 50 words.
- 2) Identify the different stakeholders involved in this issue.
- 3) Identify the level of government which is involved.
- 4) Describe how stakeholders have made their voices heard.
- 5) What was the result of people's protests?
- 6) In your view, has the council done enough to meet the demands of the citizens?
Give reasons why or why not.

Issue 3: Dredging up trouble?

Compiled by Vikki Leone, The Age Monday March 7, 2005

Deepening the shipping channels of Port Phillip Bay is not just an economic issue.



What is the channel deepening project?

The State Government has proposed a \$545 million dollar project to deepen the shipping channels into Port Phillip Bay, allowing larger vessels to enter the Port of Melbourne. It would involve dredging 32.1-million cubic metres of sand and silt from the bay, working day and night over two years, creating large plumes of sediment.

Why deepen the channel?

Melbourne might be Australia's busiest container port but it does not have the deep-water advantages of Sydney or Brisbane and is too shallow for many modern cargo ships.

According to the Port of Melbourne Authority, 95 to 98 per cent of Australia's trade is conducted by sea with much of it going through Port Phillip Bay. However, it claims that 30 per cent of container ships arriving in Melbourne are not fully loaded because of the shallow channels. The Australian Peak Shippers Association, representing exporters, says the figure is closer to 15 per cent. With a trend towards larger ships, shipping authorities believe that if Melbourne is to remain an important port, large-scale dredging of the channels is vital.

Who will benefit?

Supporters of the project say it will boost our competitiveness and benefits will flow on to Victorians through improved trade and more jobs, investment and economic growth.

Shipping Australia chief executive Llew Russell says ships now carry 180 fewer export containers and 120 fewer import containers because of insufficient depth at Port Phillip heads and in the channels. Hastings on Western Port Bay (with its naturally deep harbour), Geelong and Portland have been put forward as alternative ports, but their development has been dismissed as unfeasible or financially prohibitive. The Victorian Minister for Manufacturing and Export, Tim Holding, says an environmental effects statement shows deepening can be undertaken in an environmentally acceptable way and the bay protected.

What is the case against the project?

It is largely on environmental grounds that the proposal has run into significant opposition.

About 70 per cent of the bay's biodiversity is found in the reefs and seagrass beds at its southern end. Environmental groups and the Australian Marine Sciences Association have questioned the credibility of the environmental effects statement.

Environmental scientist Dr Graham Harris says that dredging will affect the bay's ability to clean itself, endanger marine national parks and pose a significant risk to ecosystems around the heads and southern section of the bay. Disturbed sediment may prevent light from reaching sea beds, smothering the tiny plants and animals that process nutrients in the bay and help to keep it clean. Marine life will be threatened by the disruption of ecosystems with the removal of sand and reefs.

It is also estimated the dredging will cost the tourism industry millions of dollars.

Critics say that alternatives have not been fully explored and most ships do not require maximum channel depth. (Melbourne company OMC International, for instance, says its technology used all over the world helps ships navigate shallow channels.)

The Blue Wedges Coalition - the largest community group fighting the project - has presented a petition against the channel-deepening project with approximately 20,000 signatures to the State Government.

Recent headlines

"What's the bottom line?" The Age, February 28, 2005

"Exporters break ranks on bay dredging plan" The Age, February 21, 2005

"Melbourne must remain Victoria's first port of call" The Age, January 12, 2005

"The bay: are we in too deep" The Sunday Age, December 19, 2004

What The Age says:

"Plans to deepen the Port Phillip Bay shipping channel are creating environmental concerns that have inspired a public protest today. The Age understands this concern but also shares the majority industry view that Victoria must maintain adequate port facilities to ensure economic competitiveness. We have urged a thorough, cautious and transparent review of the proposal. The project is, however, regarded as a near-certainty to proceed when the Government responds to the planning panel's report. Should dredging cause significant environmental damage, this Government will wear the blame."

Editorial opinion, The Age, February 22, 2005

Source: <http://www.education.theage.com.au/pagedetail.asp?intpageid=1441&strsection=&intsectionid=0>

Your view (Questions)

1. Identify three ways in which opponents of Dredging have made their voices heard.
2. Identify three economic or social benefits of channel deepening (Use the text or the internet to find your answers)
3. Identify three environmental risks of channel deepening (Use the text or the internet to find your answers)
4. Do you think the economic and social benefits of the channel deepening project outweigh the environmental risks? Give reasons for your answer.